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ABSTRACT

Four teachers who founded a free school summarize their experience for the benefit of other groups who might want to do so. Topics covered include the economics of running a school, finding a building, deciding what grades to begin with, assembling a staff, administrative structure, working with a local public school, and establishing a curriculum. Also included is a list of resources for free schools, including a bibliography, lists of supplies and companies which produce them, and lists of suggested art materials. The benefits and drawbacks of the free school, the kinds of children who do well or poorly there, and evaluation techniques are also discussed briefly. (JK)

ED 066011

ACT NOW

A practical guide to starting free schools based on the experiences of the Rockland Project School staff and students.

EM 010 079

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THE ROCKLAND PROJECT SCHOOL
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION - ROCKLAND PROJECT SCHOOL:

The Rockland Project School was founded by four public school teachers who, after many years of active participation in many areas of public education, decided to establish an alternative school. Originally intending to change the public schools by providing a model, our influence has been more to encourage the development of additional free independent schools than to alter the plans or attitudes of the local public schools. We now find ourselves members of a world-wide, growing community of child-centered schools, and are writing this booklet to help others free themselves and their children to an alternative kind of learning and a new kind of life.

The school opened in September 1969 with twenty seven students. The idea began in February of 1969 when the four of us were griping at a dinner party about the ills of the school district in which we all taught. We subsequently read George Leonard's Education and Ecstasy and Joseph Featherstone's New Republic articles on the British Primary Schools. Motivated by what could be we began weekly meetings to formulate and articulate philosophy, to plan a typical day (we later learned there is no such thing), to investigate funding possibilities and to get to know each other better. These meetings were full of excitement. We talked, made charts, read extensively, wrote, rewrote and collectively edited statements of

our philosophy, our goals, and our methods.

We began to think about opening the school in September of 1970, and by May of 1969 we found that we needed to take our ideas to parents for their reactions. At our first meeting two children were registered for the coming September. The following week our employers "discoverd" our plans and demanded that we resign that afternoon. No amount of discussion could convice them that we were not being insubordinate. More parents' meetings followed, with renewed vigor, and by mid-July we had 23 students, enough to open in September, 1969. (We completed an application for a state charter, which we later successfully defended at a hearing in Albany.) We rented the classroom wing of the Friend's Meeting House in Blauvelt, New York for $300 a month (September through June) and began ordering supplies. Since we believed that a rich environment was necessary to allow each child access to the possibilities of many different experiences, we spent approximately $5000 on supplies for forty kids. Although we ended the year with 49, the year round average was forty students. We now have 50 . Further information about what we feel are valuable supplies etc. is contained in the list on page 13.

The organization of the following information is based on a comprehensive questionaire sent to us by a group of parents in Overland Park, Kansas and on questions asked us by groups involved in starting free schools. We hope the answers are helpful. If any readers have insights or information to contribute on any point, we would be glad to hear from you to possibly incorporate your ideas into later editions of this booklet.

I. HOW CAN A FREE SCHOOL BE FUNDED?

A. Tuition: We depend solely on tuition for funds. This places a financial burden on parents and somewhat limits our student body to a certain socio-economic group. We have tried to solve the problem by requesting a $100 scholarship donation from each family, and by the initiation of money raising activities for our scholarship fund. This has been only partially successful.

B. A Parent Cooperative: In this situation tuition could be lower because parents give time instead of money and fewer teachers have to be hired. (See page 4).

C. Foundation Support: Foundation money is hard to come by and is usually granted for short periods. Schools depending on foundation funding must make provisions for financing their school once the funds are withdrawn.

D. Fund-Raising: During the last year at our school a committee of parents was organized to raise those funds needed for scholarships. This committee was able to raise $63.5 in the following ways:

1. Parent contributions	$1700
2. Other gifts	1350
3. Benefit concert	400
4. Bake sale	35
5. Tennis parties	600
6. Covered dish suppers	200
7. School Fair	100
8. State Aid	1300
	$6385

There are other possibilities for fund raising:

1. Film festivals
2. Mass mailings requesting funds (A list of participating corporations is available from:

National Association of Independent Schools
4 Liberty Square
Boston, Mass.

2. WHAT DO YOU ESTIMATE TO BE THE APPROXIMATE COST OF RUNNING A FREE SCHOOL?

A. The budgets for our 2 years of operation are given below:

1969-1970 (approximate)

Income	$45,500	
Expenditures		
Salaries	$33,000	(4 teachers)
Initial supplies	5,000	
Rent	3,000	
Running supplies	1,800	($200 per mo.)
Insurance	500	
Telephone	300	
Social Security (optional)	1,500	
	$45,100	

1970 - 1971 (approximate)

Income	$62,000	
Expenditures		
Salaries	$50,000	(5 teachers)
Initial supplies	4,000	
Rent	3,500	
Running supplies	1,800	($200 per mo.)
Insurance	500	
Telephone	300	
Social Security	1,800	
	$61,900	

B. How we arrived at our tuition price: It seems very simple but it is a question that has been frequently asked. We arrived at our tuition by setting a reasonable figure for rent and incidentals, adding salaries for the teachers, money for supplies to start the school and for running expenses during the year. Running expenses are an important part of a free school budget because they give teachers and students an opportunity to buy supplies for

projects, to make trips, and to be flexible about the initiation of new activities.

We divided the total figure by the number of students we hoped to have and this gave us our tuition. We also established priorities in spending as we did this, since we expected to open with less than full enrollment.

We were able to order supplies before any tuition had come in. Most companies will fill orders if you send them on school stationery and will bill you 30 days after delivery. They will also accept returns.

3. WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT FINDING A BUILDING?

The ideal way to start is with your own building. However, because of a lack of capital, most free schools find it necessary to rent a building. Some renting situations involve sharing facilities with other groups; this may create difficulties, for at some point the groups may be in conflict over how the building is being used. When renting, make sure that your landlord is sympathetic, understands that there may be some unorthodox use of the building and is aware of the probable effects of having lots of mobile children using it.

Many free schools begin in church-owed space, sharing facilities with various denominations of religious schools. Such space is usually inexpensive but often has the drawback mentioned above. A free school needs storage space, places to leave unfinished projects over weekends, lots of outdoor space, and enough freedom in decoration to help create its own environment. Any building you rent must conform to state and local regulations for schools.

4. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO ORGANIZE A NEW FREE SCHOOL?

Planning for the Rockland Project School began in January, 1969. We had our first meeting for parents in May, 1969 and opened in September, 1969. Our four graduating students that first year formed a high school which opened in September, 1970 with 20 students; they began planning in late April, 1970. The planning time depends on how long it takes to:

1. Develop a philosophy
2. Find a building
3. Attract students
4. Gather a staff

5. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH GRADES TO START WITH?

Initially we discussed limiting the school to the primary grades, but found that there are many unhappy kids between 10 and 14. Also, we are committed to the idea that older kids can and do teach younger ones in ways that are not duplicable by adults. The reverse is also true. On the other hand, older kids often come with severe problems and strong negative feelings about school. At times we have felt that they were taking a disproportionate amount of our efforts, at the expense of the younger students. We have discussed refusing to take new students who are over the age of 10, except in very special circumstances. However, most circumstances end up seeming special.

6. HOW DO YOU FIND A STAFF? AND FIND OUT ABOUT THEM?

The New Schools Exchange Newsletter provides a listing of teachers looking for jobs and of schools looking for teachers. They will print without charge any ad you might send in if you are a subscriber - perhaps even if you aren't.

The four of us who planned the school became the original faculty. We had staff openings during the second year, and found that many teachers and non-teachers were interested. Several applicants visited for a day or more and we found kids' reactions to the visitors helpful. Before hiring anyone, we arranged for a trial period during which the prospective teacher could find out about the school, by actually working with us, and we could find out about him or her. We were all happy about this arrangement.

For the coming year, we have a staff of 6, 3 men and 3 women. Having both male and female teachers has been a welcome change for many of the younger children and helps to bridge the gap between school and the real world.

Each year we have had one teacher who was a full-time volunteer and others who were part-time volunteers. The volunteers who became deeply involved in the school, giving generously of time and energy, had to deal with the problem of being unpaid and with feelings ranging from uneasiness to worthlessness which this seemed to generate. It is important for volunteers to be aware that this problem may arise, and to be accurately informed about financial arrangements in the school before they become involved.

We have been asked whether it is important to have a psychologist on the staff. This is a difficult question for one group to answer for another. Our experience leads us to feel that it is not necessary, as well as being financially impossible for most schools, but one would hope that any

group beginning a school would have some background,(hopefully empirical as well as theoretical) in humanistic psychology. We feel that it is most important to feel good about kids, to act naturally with them, express your feelings openly but with adult understanding, and most crucially, to talk openly and frequently with the others on the staff about yourself, the dynamics of the interrelationships, and the kids. A trained psychologist who could volunteer as a consultant might be helpful at times.

If you are a group of parents planning a free school, it is important to include some future faculty members as soon as possible. Parents and teachers working together from the beginning can develop common goals and a good working relationship within the school.

/. WHAT KINDS OF ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE SEEM WORKABLE IN A FREE SCHOOL?

Many alternative schools prefer to be parent-teacher cooperatives where tuition is lowered by having parents volunteer to work in the school, and where parents do most of the original planning and hire the teachers.

Because ours is a staff-founded school, we have only had peripheral experience with cooperatives. Both types of structure can, of course, be successful if the following considerations are met:

1. Continuity - There should be a core of adults around on a regular basis to provide a sense of security and continuity. This is especially important on the elementary level.

2. Consistency in relationships between kids and adults. This may take longer to achieve with a large part-time staff.

3. Commitment of time - People who want to be involved in the process of a school should be active not only in the 9 to 3 operation. Parents who are trading time for tuition should be sure that their commitment is realistic and firm.

4. Involvement in early planning - Staff members from outside the parent group should not be made to feel like hired hands. Ideally they should be involved as early as possible. Interested students should also be part of the initial planning group.

At the Rockland Project School, the teachers are the administration, although decisions are made by students and parents as well. There is no hierarchy of personnel among our full time staff. Decisions are reached by consensus at daily school staff meetings, most of which are now open to students. All staff members have the same title, that of co-director, although teachers who plan to be at the school for only a year or two have told us they feel that the founders have more de-facto decision making powers because they are more involved in the long range plans of the school.

There is a board of directors made up of 4 parents and 3 staff members. The functions of the board to date have been to:

1. Sign the corporation papers
2. Make decisions about scholarship requests
3. Make decisions on staff salaries

Next year we hope to have students on the board of trustees. There are evening meetings for all kids, parents, and teachers. These meetings have the power to over-rule any decision made by the board although this has never happened.

At the present time the students do most of their legislating at all-school meetings which are held three times a

week or when an emergency arises. All participants at these meetings have one vote, regardless of age; and there are no limitations on the decision making powers of this group except those which would produce legal conflicts. At the end of this year a number of kids asked if they could come to the after-school staff meetings. We were hesitant since personal problems of individual students and their families are freely discussed at these meetings. The problem was presented to an evening meeting of students, parents and staff, and it was unanimously decided to permit any student who wished to join the after school meetings and be part of any discussion that was going on.

The staff of the Project School feels that one of its most important functions is the after school meeting. It is at these meetings that possible solutions to kid's problems as well as adult's problems are formulated. It is also the time when all misunderstandings, jealousies, bones-to-pick, etc. are aired so that the next day may begin with good feelings among the staff. It could be that these meetings are our own hang-ups, but we do feel that, considering our individual personalities and our unique administrative structure, they are a daily necessity.

There are probably as many workable administrative patterns as there are free schools. Any structure which develops naturally among staff, parents and students who trust and respect each other, and which works, is a good one. Any structure which establishes artificial hierarchies and puts barriers between the people involved is a bad one.

8. WHAT IS THE BEST METHOD OF APPROACHING A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF INSTITUTING SOME OPEN CLASSROOMS WITHIN THE SYSTEM?

One possibly effective approach might be to form a study group of interested parents and older students, as well as any interested teachers from your school system. You could show films, pass around books on educational alternatives, and have visiting speakers. Your group might generate enough parental interest to approach your school board with proposals for an experimental program. If enough parents are interested they exert political power, and school boards are generally responsive to any strong group in the community.

However, our feeling about opening one or two classrooms in a traditional school is not positive. There are many inherent problems in beginning an open classroom or free school environment: noise, faculty insecurity, child insecurity, lack of familiarity with materials, need to relearn teaching methods, reevaluation of educational objectives, and others. One does not need the added problems of a divided faculty and a divided student population as well as a divided parent group. It would, in our opinion, be better to try for the liberalization of one complete building.

9. HOW DO YOU ESTABLISH A CURRICULUM FOR A FREE SCHOOL?

We are required by law to offer subjects equivalent to those offered in the public school. We do not, however, require students to accept these subjects and many of them do not. We have become less and less reliant on traditional

curriculum since the school began. Such curriculum is generally uninspired and meaningless to kids who are self-motivated and "free". The most successful curriculum areas are those which kids perceive as relevant for their own lives. They want to know enough math to run the school store and bank, enough about plants and animals to survive in the woods for a week without food, enough chemistry to get an idea about what it is, etc. The most exciting curricula develops from the kids. It is no longer a sequential planned entity. Random and organic learning is valid, as are wildly interdisciplinary ideas. In addition, whole areas which are dealt with superficially or not at all in traditional educational settings become a major consideration. Social development and interpersonal relationships are extremely important. All this demands a daily scrutiny of the definition of curriculum.

It also demands a staff willing to step outside of their areas of competence, to admit what they don't know and to try to learn along with students as their interests develop.

Here is a partial list of some of the activities that have taken place at our school over the past two years.

School store
Local history
Math
Mystery club
Biology
Natural foods
Art Projects
Survival
Anthropology
Creative writing
Dramatics
Nok-hockey
Model building
Wood working

10. IS THERE ANY PLACE THAT YOU KNOW OF THAT MAKES AVAILABLE PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR STARTING A SCHOOL?

Yes. Rasberry Greenway's Exercises, How to Start Your Own School and Make a Book. Freestone Publishing Co., 440 Bohemian Highway, Freestone, Calif. 95472

There are primarily 3 government agencies with which you will be dealing. Your State Department of Education, your State Tax Department, and the Federal Internal Revenue Service. It is helpful to write to these departments as soon as you begin to think about starting a school as these groups will provide you with concrete information.

Contact the legal department of your State Education Department and ask them what procedures you must go through.

From your State Tax Department you will need an Employer's Instructions, Tables & Methods booklet, and the State Withholding Tax forms.

From the Internal Revenue Service you will need an Employer's Tax Guide, Federal Withholding Tax Deposit forms 941, and a tax identification number (ask about this and they will issue you one). This number is important in filing both your state and federal taxes. Also write for the pamphlet "How to Apply for Exemption For Your Organization".

II. WHAT SUPPLIES, TOOLS, ART MATERIALS AND JUNK DO YOU THINK VALUABLE OR INDISPENSIBLE?

Individual things: (All were purchased with the idea that the kids could operate them.)

A. Video tape recorder
B. Cassette tape recorders
C. Cameras - Instamatics and Super Eight (Kodak sometimes makes grants).
D. Lots of film, film leader and out takes for splicing.
E. Carpentry and metal working tools - the real thing even for four year olds - toys are not adequate. We have an electric drill, electric sabre saw, hand saws, hammers, etc.
F. Scrap lumber is a must. There is no end to the building that can go on. Most lumber yards and friendly builders have lots FREE.

G. Books - bought and collected from friends, libraries. Text books went largely unused except for math texts. Other sources are far more interesting.
H. Adult and children's magazines - one we will use next year which looks great is a kid's magazine on nature called Ranger Ricks Nature Magazine published by the National Wildlife Association. Address: Ranger Rick's Nature Club Membership, 381 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43302. Also Scope - Scholastic Press.
I. Duplication machine: kids ran off own newspaper.
J. Electric typewriters: As many as you can afford - great for fooling around and for teaching reading as well as typing.
K. Building toys: D. Stix, lego, erector sets, blocks.
L. Old motors - our kids found an old lawn mower in the woods, which they completely dismantled, cleaned, repaired, etc.
M. If you can get your hands on a non-functioning or poorly functioning car - They are Great!
N. Adding machines - we will have some this year (and we are investigating electronic calculators which are expensive but available on a leasing plan.)
O. Dress-up clothes, shoes, and hats - mens and womens.
P. Models of various kinds.
Q. Manipulative math materials and math materials which make math a daily encounter: Cuisinaire rods, counting and measuring apparatus, etc.
R. Good catalogs and companies:

1. Childcraft Education Corp.
   P.O. Box 94
   Bayonne, New Jersey 07002

2. Welch Scientific Corp.
   7300 N. Linder Ave.
   Skokie, Illinois 60076

3. Bro-Dart (Library & A.V. supplies)
   P.O. Box 1120
   Newark, New Jersey 07101

4. Responsive Environments Corp.
   200 Sylvan Ave.
   Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

5. Educational Development Center
   55 Chapel Street
   Newton, Mass. 02160

6. Creative Playthings
   Princeton, New Jersey 0.540

7. Wang Laboratories Inc. (electronic calculator)
   836 North Ave.
   Tewsbury, Mass. 01 76

8. NASCO (science & math materials)
   Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin 5353[illegible]

9. Cuisinaire Company of America
   12 Church Street
   New Rochelle, N.Y. 10805

10. Edmund Scientific
    300 Edscorp Bldg.
    Barrington, N.J. 08007

11. Whole Earth Catalog (will stop publishing in 1971)
    Portola Institute
    558 Santa Cruz Ave.
    Menlo Park, Calif.

12. New Schools Exchange (information on new free schools)
    2840 Hidden Valley Lane
    Santa Barbara, Calif. 93103

13. Vocations for Social Change (information on new ideas
    Canyon, Calif. & social organization)

14. Big Rock Candy Mountain (catalog-children's things)
    Portola Institute
    558 Santa Cruz Ave.
    Menlo Park, Calif.

S. Art Materials:

1. Ceramics: kiln, clay, glazes, wheel can be added later - coils, slab and pinching are fun.
2. Silver jewelry making: need someone who knows how - kids love it.
3. Exacto knives
4. Linoleum blocks and speedball knives, printing ink, brayers, and press.
5. Lots of newsprint (some local newspapers give away rolls), construction paper.
6. Balsa wood and wood cement for models.
7. Scrap plastics - kids made elaborate model houses from it.
8. Glue, paste, masking tape, magic markers, string and crayons in large quantities.
9. Oil paints - even 5 year olds love it
10. Finger paints, tempura paints & water colors.
11. Paint brushes
12. Stained glass supplies: glass, copper foil, flux, 50-50 or 60-40 solder. Find someone to show you how - get materials from: Bendheim Corp., New York City (off Canal St.)

13. Charcoal for sketching
14. Leather for sandal making: sandals cost about $3.00 a pair if you can find someone to explain how - it takes muscles but is not hard.
15. Old books or wallpaper samples
16. Scraps of material for everything: collage to doll clothes to puppets.
17. Silk screening materials

12. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR BIBLIOGRAPHY ON EFFECTIVE EDUCATION?

Here is a general bibiliography. There are, no doubt, lots of good titles missing. Reading is good background but doing is better - we found we reached a saturation point in assimilating others' ideas and experiences.

BOOKS

Ashton-Warner, Sylvia - Teacher

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development - To Nuture Humaness and Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming.

Bazely, E.T. - Homer Lane and the Little Commonwealth.

Blackie, John - Inside the Primary Schools.

Bruner, Jerome - Toward a Theory of Instruction.

Chall, Jeanette - Learning to Read.

Dennison, George - Lives of Children.

Fridenber, Edgar - Coming of Age in America and The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms.

Fromm, Erich - The Art of Loving.

Glasser, William - Schools Without Failure.

Goodman, Paul - Growing up Absurd and Compulsory Miseducation.

Gross, Beatrice & Ronald - Radical School Reform.

Herndon, James - The Way it Spozed to Be and How to Survive in Your Native Land.

Holt, John - How Children Fail. How Children Learn. The Underachieving School.

Illich, Ivan - DeSchooling Society.

King, Edmund - Other Schools and Ours.

Kohl, Herbert - The Open Classroom and 36 Children.

Kozol, Jonathan - Death at an Early Age.

Leonard, George - Education and Ecstasy.

Maslow, Abraham - Toward a Psychology of Being.

Neill, A.S. - Summerhill. Freedom Not License. Talking of Summerhill.

Postman, Neil - Teaching as a Subversive Activity.

Rogers, Carl - Freedom to Learn. On Becoming a Person.

Silberman, Charles - Crisis in the Classroom.

Snitzer, Herb - Living at Summerhill.

PERIODICALS

New Republic, "The Primary School Revolution", Joseph Featherstone, Aug. 10th, Sept. 2nd, Sept. 9th, 1967. Reprinted by Pitman Publ. Co., 20 E. 46th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10017 - 50¢ each.

New Schools Exchange Newsletter, 301 East Canon Perdido St., Santa Barbara, Calif. ($5.00 for 5 mo. or $10.00 for 12 mo. In addition to regular issues - a directory of new schools, period papers, and free ad insertions.

Saturday Review, (Education supplement published monthly).

The New York Times Book Review, Sept. 20,1970.

The Teacher Paper, Quarterly: Published by Fred & Robin Staab, 280 North Pacific Ave., Monmouth, Oregon 97361. $2.00 per year. Mainly directed to public school teachers to help them not feel "isolated" and to keep them abreast of "stimulating schools and ideas".

This Magazine is About Schools, 56 Esplanade St., East, Suite 301, Toronto 215, Ontario. $3.50 for 4 issues.

Outside The Net, Box 184, Lansing, Mich. 48901

Vocations for Social Change Bulletin, Canyon, Calif. 94516 - Free but operates on donations - says it is anti-profit. Not solely an education periodical but has list of available jobs and personnel.

OTHER SOURCES OF BIBLIOGRAPHIES

The N.Y. Summerhill Society, 339 Lafayette Ave., N.Y. N Y. 10012

Teacher Drop Out Center, P.O. Box 521, Amherst, Mass. 01002

KOA, c/o Arrakis, RFD # 1, Jeffersonville, N.Y. 12748.

E.D.C. (Educational Development Center) Newton, Mass. Has ideas for methods of teaching science and math. We have found that some of their ideas are great. They sponsor cardboard carpentry workshops which will give you some ideas of the possibilities of using the tri-wall cardboard to make very interesting and durable furniture, etc. for schools.

THE NEXT FEW QUESTIONS DO NOT RELATE DIRECTLY TO STARTING A FREE SCHOOL. THEY ARE PERHAPS THE ONES MOST COMMONLY ASKED BY INTERESTED PARENTS OR BY TEACHERS TRYING TO VISUALIZE TEACHING IN SUCH A SCHOOL. WE SUGGEST YOU THINK ABOUT OUR ANSWERS BUT DEVELOP YOUR OWN WITH YOUR STAFF.

13. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO KIDS IN FREE SCHOOLS?

A. Parents report that most children are happier.

B. Children with social and psychological problems ben fit from the chance to develop closer relationships with staff members and other students.

C. Kids become more relaxed and physically more capable - in other words more together.

D. Kids have a chance to follow specialized interests.

E. Kids develop the self-assurance to be independent.

F. Kids learn that freedom involves making responsible choices, and that they have the chance to control their own lives and change their environment.

G. People in free schools, exposed to a wide range of values, have a chance to develop the ability to move from one sub-culture to another while maintaining their own individuality.

14. WHAT KIDS DO BEST IN A FREE SCHOOL?

A. Kids who have had little or no experience in traditional schools.

B. Kids who have freely chosen for themselves to go to a free school.

C. Kids who come from a home environment supportive of the values of a free school.

15. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS WHICH HINDER A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO BENEFIT FROM A FREE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE?

A. Older children, often having accepted the values of traditional education, may feel guilty in a free school and find it difficult to identify things they want to do as opposed to things they think they should do.

B. Some children suffer from the limited range of friends their sex and age in a small free school and want to experience other schools where they might find a greater variety of social relationships.

C. Family situations in which the parents do not fully understand or in general agree with the free school idea create difficulties for the kid.

16. WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT KIDS WITH SPECIALIZED INTERESTS?

We encourage them by learning what we can in their field, and by providing materials, activities and outside resource people to help them. We try to avoid pushing these students into visible accomplishment with an interest, or into a long term commitment if an interest is being outgrown.

17. WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT THE KID WHO DOES NOTHING?

We are often tempted to accuse kids of doing nothing when, in truth, they may be really into many things - they are simply not doing what <u>we</u> would choose to do. Some

kids never participate in any group meetings or classes - they just watch. Others spend months playing hok-hockey or baseball or sit around talking for most of the day. The younger kids spend hours playing dress-up or guns. They <u>are</u> doing something.

Most new students go through several stages of activity. At first they tend to be very busy, going to all sorts of classes. Gradually they attend fewer classes and may finally stop altogether. Sooner or later most become uncomfortable with their inactivity. For us to interfere here would be to invalidate the whole point of the school. Eventually inactivity makes a student so unhappy that he begins to be more involved in activities and with adults. But now he is doing things he is interested in, because he wants to, or at least doing things because he can see a necessity for doing them.

Some students get stuck for a long time at the stage of inactivity and may actually leave the school instead of resolving the problem. Even in these cases, we are convinced that forcing the situation would not help the student. Rather we try to get across to him the idea that this is a normal process and that we have confidence in his ability to work his way through it. Our role is not to be intrusive but to freely offer our time and ideas, remembering that each situation is different.

18. HOW DO YOU EVALUATE STUDENTS?

A. We don't give grades or report cards, but evaluation in our school is constant and individual. We believe that

all teachers in the school, not just the ones who may be involved with a particular student, should be familiar with the student's interests and activities. Therefore kids are discussed at the daily after-school meetings as well as at parent conferences. Informal evaluation discussions between a student and teacher are frequent although not formally scheduled. Standardized tests are available for students who want to take them, and some do. The results are discussed privately with the child and used diagnostically. When other schools request transcripts, instead of using the forms sent to us, we write a letter about the student who is leaving.

The morning meetings also lead to a kind of social evaluation of students, since we encourage kids to discuss conflicts which they can't settle on their own.

B. Record keeping - we periodically go through the list of students and record all of their activities to date.

19. WHY DO KIDS LEAVE FREE SCHOOLS AND WHAT HAPPENS TO KIDS WHEN THEY LEAVE?

We can only answer this question from our own experience: Over a period of three years twenty-four kids have left R.P.S. Nine "graduated", seven moved or left for financial reasons, the remaining eight left because they, or their parents felt that R.P.S. wasn't meeting their needs. Letters from those who moved indicate things are going well. We've had little feedback from others and no specific complaints. It's too soon for us to have a good answer to this question.